

Testimony of SEMCOG
House Energy and Technology Committee HB5334
October 20, 2009

My name is Chuck Hersey. I am the manager of Environmental programs for SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. SEMCOG represents 163 local units of government. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

As you are keenly aware, revenues to state and local government are in steep decline. Yet, we must continue to provide quality services to retain current population and jobs as well as to attract more. Now, more than ever, we are pursuing opportunities to save revenue yet maintain quality service.

With some clarification or amendments, SEMCOG supports HB5334 for the following reasons:

- The bill enables local governments to make the choice of how to manage yard waste
- That choice allows for the consideration of locally varying situational factors such as cost of collection, cost of disposal, energy recovery potential, etc.
- Some communities could save significantly on collection costs
- The bill does not diminish protection of the environment
- Landfill gas would have to be collected and used in energy recovery
- Based on the pilot study in St. Clair County, it may be preferable to strategically use organic waste at landfills to stimulate gas production and reduce space needed

There are some issues that need clarification or amendment. In particular, we need to clarify the roles of the county solid waste plan and the communities doing the collection in this process. We understand you are open to discussion and would be happy to offer language.

In short, properly structured, the Bill would revise what was once relatively common in environmental statutes: the prohibition of a certain practice no matter what the circumstances. In this case, the prohibition is a ban on yard waste in landfills.

This may be just one of several examples where we can re-craft statutory language to provide a framework that enables affected parties to make choices based on their particular circumstances. Two outcomes are achieved: the environment is protected and tax dollars are saved.

Thank you.